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Goldoni on Playwriting

PUBLICATIONS

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IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Fourth Series

Discussions of the Drama:

I 'GOETHE ON THE THEATER,' selections from the conversations with Eckermann; translated by John Oxenford. With an introduction by William Witherle Lawrence.

II 'GOLDONI ON PLAYWRITING'; translated and compiled by F. C. L. Van Steenderen. With an introduction by H. C. Chatfield-Taylor.

III 'PROSPERO'S ISLAND,' by Edward Everett Hale. With an introduction by Henry Cabot Lodge.

IV 'LETTERS OF AN OLD PLAYGOER' by Matthew Arnold. With an introduction by Brander Matthews.

DISCUSSIONS OF THE DRAMA

II

Goldoni on Playwriting

BY

F. C. L. VAN STEENDEREN

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

H. C. CHATFIELD-TAYLOR

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INTRODUCTION

Among the writers of whom Italy is justly proud, Carlo Goldoni, the Venetian dramatist, holds a commanding place. Tho not a world genius such as Dante, Petrarch or Boccaccio, he is nevertheless the foremost playwright of his native land. Furthermore, he is the pioneer poet of a people, no previous dramatist having painted the life of the common people in colors so truthful as his.

Being simply a naturalist, he had no avowed purpose, such as Molière's, to correct the vices of his time; his ambition being merely "not to spoil nature." Yet he spoiled it whenever he transplanted some exotic story to the soil of his native Italy; since only when he painted the life of Venice, was he *Gran Goldoni,* the tribune of her people.

His work fairly covers the entire range of the drama,—tragedy, tragi-comedy, comedy, farce, extravaganza, opera and opéra-bouffe; yet he is eminent only in comedy. Thru this dramatic form, he blazed a virgin path; for

altho he has been called the Italian Molière, his dramatic naturalism is peculiarly his own, his genius being quite apart from that of *Le Grand Comique.*

Goldoni's merit lies in his fidelity to nature. When using the plots of Molière and other Frenchmen, or in attempting to emulate them, as he sometimes did, he forgot his own dictum that "every clime has its national taste;" for whenever he strayed into a land to which his southern blood was not acclimated, his work became insignificant.

His ambition was to reform the Italian stage; yet, his reform was brought about so gradually and he wandered away from his beloved Venice so frequently that perhaps no writer of a world-wide repute has ever written so unevenly. Not only did he write many kinds of plays, but many kinds of comedies as well, his dramatic output, roughly speaking, being a hundred and fifty comedies and a hundred tragedies, operatic tragedies and opéras-bouffes. Indeed, his comedies in verse alone fairly vie in number with all the plays of Shakspere, and equal those of Molière; therefore, in judging him, the terrific pace at which he workt should be borne in mind.

He wrote comedies in Tuscan and comedies wholly or partly in the Venetian dialect; comedies in prose and comedies in verse; some dealt with the life of Venice, others were exotic in subject; some were comedies of character, others of intrigue; some were serious, others light; some dealt with fashionable life, others with the bourgeoisie or the common people. At no time, however, in his long career did he confine his work to any particular style; his choice of subject being determined either by his mood or the demands of his managers. Prose was the natural medium of his art; verse a form of expression forced upon him by the exigencies of contemporaneous literary taste.

He was not a palpable imitator; yet there are points of similarity between the creator of French comedy and himself which justify to a certain degree his sobriquet of "the Italian Molière." Both he and the great Frenchman, for instance, learned their technic in the same school—the Italian Commedia dell'Arte, or Improvised Comedy—and by discarding the stereotyped characters and farcical intrigues of that comedy for true characterization and human situations, each

created a national comedy of manners. Certain coincidences, too, may be found in their lives, since both dramatists attended a school taught by Jesuits, and both studied law; although Goldoni alone practised at the bar. Moreover, each of these masters of comedy when harassed by the critics of his day, defended his art by a dramatic skit in which he set forth his theories of the drama, Molière's being the 'Critique de l'Ecole des femmes,' and Goldoni's the 'Teatro comico.'

Altho these coincidences establish a casual relationship between the two dramatists, such occurrences are merely fortuitous; Goldoni's character being as different from Molière's as his genius is foreign to the Frenchman's. The one was light-hearted by nature, the other overborne at times by sorrow or misfortune; Molière's views, like his experiences, being deeper and farther reaching than those of his transalpine rival. Yet both were at heart optimists, else they could not have exprest themselves best in comedy. There is a serious phase in Molière's work, however, indicative of the tragedy he lived—a sadder note than is ever sounded by his Venetian rival. The Frenchman, moreover,

is broader in his vision and more suggestive, a greater poet, too, and a greater philosopher. Therefore, it is an unkindness to Goldoni to compare him with Molière.

The genial cleanser of Italian comedy viewed life optimistically and wore a helpful smile upon his lip. "Lovable painter of nature," Voltaire called him, and today he remains the most wholesome writer in the entire dramatic realm. Indeed, to the wholesomeness of his mind quite as much as to his humor is due the truly tender affection in which he is held throughout Italy. It is this lovable human quality in Goldoni which Browning depicts in the following sonnet, written at the time the playwright's statue was unveiled in Venice:

Goldoni—good, gay, sunniest of souls,—
  Glassing half Venice in that verse of thine,—
  What though it just reflect the shade and shine
  Of common life, nor render, as it rolls,
Grandeur and gloom? Sufficient for thy shoals
  Was Carnival; Parini's depths enshrine
  Secrets unsuited to that opaline
  Surface of things which laughs along thy scrolls.
There throng the people; how they come and go,
  Lisp the soft language, flaunt the bright garb,—see,—
  On Piazza, Calle, under Portico
And over Bridge! Dear King of Comedy,
  Be honored! thou that didst love Venice so,—
  Venice, and we who love her, all love thee!

Born in Venice at the beginning of the eighteenth century, Goldoni died in Paris barely a fortnight after Louis XVI mounted the scaffold, the span of his life being eighty-four years, during forty-six of which he was a writer for the professional stage of Italy and France. During his happy-go-lucky youth he was ever in amorous adventure or college boy scrapes. At the age of fourteen, for instance, he ran away from school to join a band of strolling players, and at eighteen he was expelled from college for writing a satire upon the inhabitants of Pavia. Indeed, save in its last moments, his life was a continuous comedy.

During his earlier years his vagrant spirit led him into many channels and thru many adventures. From 1721, when he ran away from school at Rimini and traveled to his home at Chioggia with a band of strolling players, until the autumn of 1748, when he appeared in Venice as the playwright of a troupe managed by an actor named Medebac, he led a fitful life as a student, diplomatist and lawyer, a life at once adventurous and unsuccessful. From 1734 until 1748 he wrote plays for the troupe of an actor

named Imer; yet during a part of this time he was Genoese consul at Vence; so it cannot be said that he had adopted playwriting as his profession. It was his avocation rather than his vocation; furthermore he abandoned the stage in 1744 to practise law at Pisa. During this first period of his life he wrote some thirty dramatic pieces: tragedies, tragi-comedies, operas, operatic interludes, opéras-bouffes, written comedies, and improvised comedies. It was a period of essay during which he was groping in dramatic darkness, and still dubious of dramatic writing as a profession.

Burning his legal bridges entirely in 1747 by signing a contract with Medebac, he appeared in Venice during the following year as a professional dramatist and, to quote his own words, "abandoned himself without reflection to the comic genius that had lured him." For fourteen years he wrote professionally for the stage of Venice; his life, except for quarrels with managers, actresses and critics, being joyously lived in the tranquility of domestic peace. During that happy time he penned fully a hundred comedies and about half as many opéras-bouffes. Graced

by nearly all his masterpieces, this was the most prolific period of his life, as well as the period of his greatest achievement.

When the indifference of the public and the attacks of rivals and critics drove him into exile in Paris in 1762, he began again in France, as the playwright of Les Comédiens du roi de la troupe italienne, the reform of comedy he had accomplisht in Italy; yet he fought less valiantly for his ideals. Tho he penned some fifty comedies, scenarî and opéras-bouffes in France, once only did his genius shine with its full splendor, and then in a foreign tongue.

At the age of forty-three when he was still striving for Venetian success, Goldoni performed the Herculean task of writing sixteen comedies in a single year, exactly double the number he was under contract with Medebac to supply annually. Two or three of his plays had failed at the Sant'Angelo Theater, and its leading comedian had announced his intention of leaving it to take service with the King of Poland; whereupon the box-holders began to refuse to renew their subscriptions for the ensuing season.

This state of affairs called for drastic

action and Goldoni stept into the breach in the bold manner he thus describes: "Offended on my side by the ill temper of the public, and being blindly confident that I amounted to something, I wrote for the leading actress the Complimento with which the season ended, and made her say in bad verse, but very clearly and very positively, that the author who workt for her and her comrades agreed to present sixteen new comedies during the ensuing year. The troupe on the one hand and the public on the other at once gave me a certain and very flattering proof of their confidence, for the actors did not hesitate to accept an engagement upon my word, and a week later all the boxes were let for the ensuing year. When I made this agreement I had not a single subject in mind; yet I had to keep my word or die. My friends trembled, my enemies laught. I comforted the former, I made game of the latter. . . . It was a terrible year for me, which I cannot recall without trembling again. Sixteen comedies in three acts, each requiring for its performance, according to Italian usage, two hours and a half!"

That theatrical season (1750-51) was in-

deed "terrible," and the wonder is that Goldoni did not die in the attempt to keep his defiant promise to the Venetian public. He had agreed to produce sixteen new comedies, which in addition to the labor of writing, meant the onerous task of rehearsal. In length, including stage directions, his comedies average about twenty-five thousand words; hence he had contracted to write four hundred thousand words, or the equivalent of a newspaper column a day of the most difficult kind of imaginative work. Not only was he called upon to pen the average daily stint of the modern newspaper man, but he must accomplish it in dialog that would unfold a dramatic story vivaciously and entertainingly. He had, moreover, to invent the subjects for his sixteen comedies, as well as to construct their plots. The physical task he had set himself was the equivalent of writing five novels of the present day, but in imaginative requirements it was far greater. When it is borne in mind that a prolific novelist produces no more than two novels a year, and that a popular playwright, such as the late Clyde Fitch, including both original plays and adaptations, placed upon his

stage a little more than forty dramatic pieces in a period of twenty years, some idea may be gained of the gigantic nature of Goldoni's undertaking.

Not only did he produce sixteen new plays at the Sant' Angelo Theater during a single theatrical season, but he was writing the libretti of five comic operas as well, which were performed at other theaters, and he had, besides, orders for comedies from other cities. Moreover, in spite of this abnormal work, there were only two failures among the sixteen plays, while three of their number, 'Femmine puntigliose,' the 'Bottega del caffè,' and the 'Dama prudente,' take a high, if not a commanding rank in their author's work.

The first of this remarkable series of plays is the 'Teatro comico,' which, as I have already stated, Goldoni wrote to defend himself against his critics. A confession of faith rather than a play, in which he took occasion to berate the antiquated methods of the Improvised Comedy and prepare the public for the suppression of the mask actor's hackneyed tricks, it is in reality a bold polemic

intended by its author to be the prolog to his reform of Italian comedy.

So flimsy in plot, that dramatically it is the merest skit, the 'Comic Theater' nevertheless abounds in both atmosphere and characterization. A company of actors are discovered on their stage rehearsing a comedy. They are interrupted by a playwright who tries to dispose of his antiquated wares to a canny manager, and failing in his purpose, decides that rather than starve he will become an actor himself. An opera-singer out of employment appears, seeking an engagement to sing intermezzi, and she too descends to histrionism as a last resort. The incidents of the 'Comic Theater' are too attenuated, however, to constitute more than a slender sketch; yet it pictures life behind the scenes so candidly and portrays stage-folk so ruthlessly, that the wonder is that Medebac's players did not refuse to appear in this exposure of the egotism that distinguishes their calling. Here are shown all the vagabond types that compose a theatrical troupe; the overbearing leading lady and her harassed manager, the pert soubrette, the vain jeune premier, and the coarse comedian

hungering for laughs, each as clamorous for a "fat part" as any modern star; for as one of them says: "There are some actors who have the conceit to judge a comedy by their part. If it is short, they say that the comedy is poor. They would all like to play the leading *rôle,* since the actor rejoices and is glad when he hears laughter and handclapping:

> For if the public's hands clap hard,
> The actor's worthy of regard."

While stripping his actors of their pretensions and exposing their artistic leanness to the public, Goldoni gives them considerable wise counsel. "Don't you see that it isn't right to address the audience?" he makes the manager in this play say to a member of his company. "When he is alone on the stage, an actor should pretend that no one hears or sees him; for this habit of speaking to the audience is an intolerable fault that should not be permitted on any ground whatever." In the following speech from this skit Goldoni vies with Shakspere in artistic sanity: "See to it that you pronounce clearly the last syllables, so they can be heard. Recite slowly, but not too slowly; and in strong passages

speak louder, and accelerate your speech. . . . Guard especially against drawling and against declamation; speak naturally, as if you were talking; since comedy is an imitation of nature, everything that is done must be likely and probable."

Tho dramatically the 'Comic Theater' is but a gossamer, in biographical texture it is so durable, that from its lines much insight into Goldoni's literary life is gained; for besides presenting its author's theories of writing and acting, it shows the difficulties that lay in his progress toward fame. For instance, when a hack writer in this play declares that he intends to write comedies as good as Goldoni's, the manager, speaking *ex cathedra* says: "Ah, my lad, you must first spend on the stage as many years as he has past there, and then you may hope to be able to do something. Do you think he became a writer of comedies all at once? He did so little by little, and succeeded in being appreciated by the public only after long study, long practice, and a continuous and untiring observation of the stage, and of the manners and customs, as well as the genius of nations."

At the time when Goldoni began to write for the stage of his day, the Improvised Comedy was in its decadence. In its prime this stage-parody of life, unexcelled in spontaneity and truth to nature, was allied to the fine arts; in its decline it became the base medium of anathematized buffoons, forbidden by law to enter decent houses.

Goldoni has been accused of never escaping from the influence of the Improvised Comedy; yet when he discards the masks and their lazzi entirely and presents the life of his beloved Venice just as it appears to his artistic eyes, his work is as free from the streotyped devices of the Improvised Comedy as that of Molière; for then he appears as a consummate naturalist depicting actual life in truthful colors. Yet, only a few times in his long dramatic career did he liberate himself wholly from the hackneyed tricks of the native comedy, or the stilted artifice of the French comedy of his day.

His ambition was to reform the Improvised Comedy by creating from its elements a national written comedy, his method being to accustom the public to written plays constructed in the old style with some or all of

the stereotyped characters; then to discard this style and these characters entirely, and present to his countrymen a written comedy along traditional French lines. Yet so little did he appreciate his true genius that his memoirs teem with defense of artificial comedies he had written under French influence, while his naturalistic masterpieces often receive scant mention. Nevertheless, he seems to have understood that his ability to reproduce the life about him was the source of his immediate success; for while he scolded his countrymen for their inability to appreciate refined comedy, he catered to their taste. He had, moreover, a definite purpose in view, which he exprest in these words: "Now there was within me this self-same spirit, which making me a most attentive observer of the comedies that were being performed in the various theaters of Italy, caused me to recognize and lament their corrupted taste, while comprehending at the same time that the public would derive no little benefit, and he who should succeed, no small praise, if some man of talent inspired by the comic spirit should attempt to uplift the abased

Italian theater. This hope of glory finally enlisted me in the undertaking."

When Goldoni began to reform Italian comedy there were seven regular playhouses in operation in his native city,—more than obtained in Paris then, and more than are to be found in Venice now. Three of these were devoted to comedy and at each of them he was in turn employed, first at the San Samuele, when Imer was his manager, then at the Sant' Angelo under Medebac, and finally at the San Luca, the property of two brothers named Vendramin, where his Venetian theatrical career terminated.

These Venetian theaters were owned by wealthy patricians, who retained the receipts of the boxes, which, like the opera-boxes of to-day, were rented for the season. A ticket to a box did not include admission to the house, a box-holder being required to pay the entrance fee, which, according to Goldoni, "never exceeded the value of a Roman *paolo*, or ten French *sous*." "As the daily receipts could not be large," he continues, "they were not worth being run after by a playwright."

With the apparent intention of permitting

play-lovers to attend several performances on the same day, the Venetian theaters opened at different hours. Their performances, however, were not seemly events, such as we are accustomed to in our modern playhouses. The boxes were the scene of frivolity and amours. Many of their occupants wore masks, and sometimes carnival costumes of indecent scantiness; indeed, in the words of an Italian writer, "almost every box was a temple of Venus." In them the fashionable world met, or young men of wealth flaunted their mistresses boldly in the public gaze. They belonged to the owners of the theaters and were let by them for the season to fellow-patricians. Besides being lovers' trysts, they were the rendezvous of groups of intimate friends, who gossiped and flirted while pelting hoi-polloi in the pit below with oranges, or even spitting upon them.

As in the case of Molière's parterre, the denizens of Goldoni's pit applauded and hissed at will, or rent the fetid air with coarse laughter and catcalls, while the patricians above them giggled, sneezed and yawned. The benches were of wood, well polished

with use, and they were scorned by ladies, tho women of the people occupied them. During the entr'actes a ticket-taker with a candle-end in hand past among them, collecting the modest price of the seats. At a popular play the gondoliers, who ordinarily were admitted to the pit, were forced to wait outside the theater, since long before the performance began the seats were filled by servants holding them for their masters, or by speculators ready to sell them at a profit. An hour before the performance two wretched candles were lighted. No lights glowed in the auditorium even after the curtain rose, except an occasional candle in the region of the upper boxes or the smudging tallow-dips of the musicians.

Between the acts girls with baskets on their arms passed between the rows of benches selling oranges, anisette, cakes, fritters, and chestnuts, while in the boxes coffee and ices were served. "At six or seven paces from the entrance to the pit," its classic missiles, baked apples and pears, were sold, altho the actor who won its favor had little to fear from its wrath, since he enjoyed in

the affections of the public the same unmerited ascendancy over the dramatist that is held by his modern compeer, the matinée-idol. Tho the authorities proclaimed him to be "a person detested of God," the popular actor was received familiarly in patrician households, and when he appeared on the stage he was greeted by such affectionate cries as: "Blessed be thou! Blessed be he who fathered thee!" or "Darling, I throw myself at thy feet!" In his wake swarmed his cronies, all of whom were dead-heads, and some of whom "got in his way on the stage, only to speak ill of the play."

At the end of the performance, it was the privilege of a popular actor to announce the next play; but if the one that had first been given happened to have pleased the audience, his voice was drowned by cries of "The same, give us the same!" Upon the first and the last night of the season a favorite actress would recite to the audience complimentary verses; but it was not customary for the mere author to appear before the curtain in response to applause.

In such an atmosphere Goldoni learned his craft. Small wonder that he pronounces

"the World and the Stage" to be "the two books upon which he has meditated most," experience being a better training for a dramatist than erudition.

To attain his fame he was obliged to tread a stony path. Wearied by the antiquated and obscene lazzi of the Improvised Comedy, the intelligent public of Venice had become wedded to the melodrama of Zeno and Metastasio; therefore Goldoni was obliged to create a following for the new comedy. His actors were only wretched outcasts beyond the social pale, whose voices, when their efforts failed to please, were drowned by the hisses and catcalls of ribald audiences. No Richelieu or Louis XIV sustained him; yet this patient Venetian plunged courageously into the task of cleansing the filthy comedy of his day. Making his theater a wholesome resort for his fellow-townsmen, he mirrored them truly there in the hope that his humorous expositions of their vices and foibles might turn them from their degeneracy back to the glory of their ancestors.

Tho experience is a bitter school, it is the only one in which practicality is taught. Thus the lesson to be learned from Goldoni's

ideas upon playwriting is the fact that the stage-craft of his day was precisely like that of our own. Indeed, I know of no better guide for an aspiring dramatist of the present time to follow than Goldoni's precepts of the dramatic art, as collected and translated by Dr. Van Steenderen, his ideas about playwriting being as sane and timely now as when they were penned, nearly two centuries ago.

In gathering them together and presenting them in their present form, Dr. Van Steenderen is more than a translator, his task having been to cull a pragraph here, a phrase there, and put ideas thus collected from a number of sources together in a way that would make them read like a spontaneous treatise on the art of playwriting.

Knowing both the delicacy and the intricacy of his task, I feel that it has been admirably accomplisht, it being difficult, I believe, for the reader of the pages which follow, to realize that they have been collected from memoirs, prefaces, plays, and letters, since they are strung together so deftly that they read like a continuous narrative. Save for a connecting link here and

there, the words are all Goldoni's, and thus formulated they express all his theories and beliefs regarding the dramatist's art.

In penning these introductory words, I have culled, freely, I confess, from the pages of my 'Goldoni, a Biography,' published in 1913. It was my intention to write about this gentle lover of mankind in language wholly different from that which I had used in my book regarding him; yet, owing to some curious mental process which I am unable to explain, my mind refused at times to respond to the calls made upon it for new words with which to clothe my ideas, former phrases coming back to mind so persistently, that I could not evade them. The result has been that, in expressing my convictions regard Goldoni and his work, I have found myself unable in a number of instances to avoid using the very phraseology I used six years ago. Plagiarism being defined as "the use of *another person's* thoughts or writings as one's own," I feel that the only literary offence which may be charged against me is repetition. Of this I am guilty to a considerable degree; yet in the instances in which I have quoted from myself, I know that it has

been to the benefit of the reader; my knowledge of Goldoni having been far more intimate, as well as more thorough, six years ago, than it is to-day.

H. C. CHATFIELD-TAYLOR.

(1919.)

GOLDONI ON PLAYWRITING

God forbid that I should set up for a teacher! I purpose merely to confide to my readers what little I may have learned or may be trying to do, reminding them, meanwhile, that even in the least important books one sometimes finds little matters deserving attention.[1] I have no mind to write an academic treatise on the Art of Comedy. Why offer oracularly, like a pedant, what has so often been repeated by valiant men of every cultured nation?[2] Nor do I mean to lay down rules for others to follow. My plan is just to make known that I have at last, thru long continued observation and practice, succeeded in blazing a path for myself which I can travel with some degree of security, offering as proof for the statement the favor which my plays enjoy among the frequenters of theaters.[3]

It must be confest that all men carry with them from their birth a natural disposition peculiar to themselves, which leads them

rather into one than another sort of study or profession, and in which they may succeed with admirable facility if they will apply themselves. As for me, I certainly have felt since my tenderest childhood the forward drive of an internal, almost insuperable power toward theatrical affairs. Whenever a play fell into my hands, I found delight in it. I remember that I wrote, merely as a result of reading some of Cicognini's dramatic works at the age of nine, a comedy, such as it was, before ever having seen one performed on the stage.

This native inclination became still stronger when I began to go to the theaters, nor did it abandon me in my various journeys among Italian cities, undertaken either for reasons of study, or to accompany my father in the course of his wanderings as a physician. At Perugia, Rimini, Milan, or Pavia, while in the midst of the disgusting work of that calling which he wished to compel me by main force to enjoy, as well as later, during my study and profession of the law, my pleasure in dramatic poetry was always finding an outlet, whether thru the writing of dialogs and comedy sketches, or

by representing some dramatic character at an aristocratic academy.

Having finally returned to Venice, I was obliged to devote myself to the legal profession in order to earn a living, my father having departed this life. My genius continued to lead me to the theater, however, and I fulfilled with painful reluctance the duties of my calling and the really honorable positions which were derived from it.[4] Thus, three or four times, I have lost the luckiest opportunities for bettering my state, but, abandoning myself without reflexion to the blandishments of the stage, I always allowed myself to be caught in the same trap.[5] In fact, I never applied myself with more delight and diligence to dramatic writing than in those far away days of my youth. So it came about that, tho I could hope for a prosperous future in the noble profession of advocate in an important court, I nevertheless denied myself to the city of my birth, resolved as I was to yield wholly to the power within me which claimed me outright for Dramatic Poetry. Intent upon learning the various usages and customs which flourish in plentiful variety in this our delightful corner of

Europe, I visited many Italian cities; and stopping finally in Milan, I began to write seriously for the Italian stage.

I have ingenuously related all this with the single view of emphasizing the true and only incentive I felt for devoting myself to the drama. It was nothing short of an invincible call of nature. I could not withstand it. Is it a wonder then that in all my journeys, amid all the vicissitudes of life, in my amusements even, my mind remained fixed and observant in the direction of this interest? Involuntarily I gathered abundant material, an inexhaustible mine of substance, ready and adapted for eventual use on the stage.[6]

What, you may ask, can be accomplished by one not naturally endowed with this spontaneous inclination? After developing thru ample study a fair knowledge of the drama, he may be able to judge correctly other men's plays, but this by no means insures his producing a successful one himself. He may, it is true, succeed in constructing plays according to rule, he may even write in the purest vernacular; yet he will have the misfortune of not pleasing on the stage. Neither, as a consequence, can he teach, for if the

spectator, coming as he does to the theater primarily for recreation, is to be induced to accept a moral lesson, it must be conveyed to him *en passant,* sweetened by poetic grace and comic wit. In short, whoever does not possess the comic genius will be unable to exercise that joyous animation which sustains the sprightliness of the characters; moreover, he will be at a loss in trying to infuse his work with that humor which is the flower of a fine mind, as well as of the peculiar talent which comedy demands.[7]

However, the self-same ardor, which made me a most attentive observer of the plays which were being performed in the various theaters of Italy, made me recognize, and also lament their corrupted taste. I fancied, besides, that the public would derive no little benefit, and he who should succeed no small praise, if some man of talent, inspired by the spirit of comedy, should attempt to lift the Italian stage out of its abasement. The hope of this glory finally enlisted me in the undertaking.

Indeed, the Comic Stage in our Italy had been so corrupt for more than a century, that among the transalpine nations it had become

an object of contempt. Upon her public boards only unseemly harlequinades and scandalous jests were in vogue. The plots were poor in conception and worse—even uncivil and ill-ordered—in the performance, since far from correcting vice as the first and most noble aim of comedy, they but fomented it. Arousing the laughter of the ignorant plebeians, dissolute youths and the most debauched of the population, the comic stage disgusted, then irritated the educated and the well-bred, who, if they sometimes attended so poor a theater, and were there dragged out of boredom, took good care not to take with them their innocent families, lest their hearts should be corrupted. The Fathers of the Church justly anathemized such plays, and they were in fact very proper subjects for the loathing of the wise.

Many tried to purify the stage and bring back good taste to it. Some attempted to do so by means of comedies translated from the Spanish or the French; but mere translations cannot be successful in Italy.[8] The stage must be imbued with national life, brought within the sphere of everybody,[9] for national points of view differ as do customs

and languages. Seeing, in spite of their purblindness, the force of this truth, our mercenary actors set about altering these foreign pieces, and reciting them in improvized form; yet they so disfigured them, that they could no longer be recognized as works of such celebrated authors as Lope de Vega and Molière who beyond the mountains, where better taste flourished, had happily written them. They treated with the same cruelty the comedies of Plautus and Terence; nor did they spare any of the other ancient and modern comedies which chanced to fall into their hands. Meanwhile the educated chafed, the public wearied. All exclaimed in accord against bad comedies, yet most people had no idea of what good ones were like.

Noticing this universal discontent, actors tried to find profit in innovation. They introduced elaborate paraphernalia, transformation scenes and magnificent stage-sets, but beyond increasing their expenses inordinately, they did not succeed at all, for the attendance of the public soon decreased. Then they tried to save comedy by means of musical interludes. This expedient succeeded well for a time, and I was among the first to con-

tribute to the number of such pieces. Since actors are not musicians, however, it was not long before it became evident how little relation there is between comedy and music. What kept the theaters open was tragedies and operas, the applause lavished upon them signifying the abasement of comedy, and offering convincing proof of its extreme decadence.[10]

The germ of comedy, however, had not been utterly killed in the prolific heart of Italy. Those who were among the first to strive toward its revival, unable as they were to find in a century of ignorance the necessary skilful writers, boldly constructed plots themselves, divided them into acts and scenes, and recited extempore the phrases, thoughts and witticisms they had agreed upon among themselves. During the last two centuries this kind of play had amused all Italy; in fact, my country had become distinguished because of it, no nation having been able to imitate Improvized Comedy. In my time it was the Bolognese who clung more tenaciously than other Italians to this form of play. There were among them people of merit who found pleasure in constructing these *com-*

medie dell'arte, and certain of their citizens played them very well, giving delight to their countrymen.

Before explaining what I think about this matter, I should like to entertain my readers for a few minutes with remarks on the origin, the use, and the effect of Improvized Comedy and the Four Masks which constituted its staple cast.

Those who knew how to read Latin found that in the comedies of Plautus and Terence there were always duped fathers, debauched sons, amorous daughters, rascally valets and doltish servants. As they traveled through Italy, the actors took the fathers from Venice and Bologna, the valets from Bergamo, the lovers—male and female—and the soubrettes from Rome and Tuscany. Indeed, I have in my possession a manuscript of the sixteenth century, well preserved and bound in parchment, containing one hundred and twenty plots of Italian plays, called Art Comedies, and the dramatic foundation of them is always Pantaloon, Merchant of Venice; the Doctor, Jurisconsult of Bologna; Brighella and Harlequin, Bergamesk Valets, the one clever, the other dull.

Pantaloon is a merchant of Venice, because Venice was in former days the state which carried on the richest and most extensive commerce in Italy. He has always worn the ancient Venetian costume; the black cloak and woollen bonnet being still in use in that city, while the red waistcoat, the breeches resembling drawers, the red stockings and slippers represent in a lifelike way the habiliments of the Lagoons of the Adriatic. Nowadays his beard, which in remote times was an adornment, is scorned and ridiculed.

The second old man, called the Doctor, was taken from among the gentlemen of the robe in order to contrast the educated man with the man of commerce, and Bologna was adopted as his home, because there existed in that city a university which, in spite of the ignorance of the times, continued to conserve the duties and emoluments of the professors. The costume of the Doctor is nearly the dress still in use at the University and the Law Court of Bologna, while the singular mask which covers his forehead and nose is supposed to imitate a purple birthmark, which marred the face of a certain jurisconsult of earlier days. Lovers of this sort of comedy

are attacht to this red spot as to a tradition.

Brighella and Harlequin, also called the two Zani, were taken from Bergamo, because the first being extremely adroit and the second completely dull, it is only in that region that one finds these extremes among the lower classes. Brighella represents an intriguing, tricky, cunning valet. His costume is a species of livery, his tawny mask exaggerates the complexion of the mountaineers of Bergamo, burned by the heat of the sun. Harlequin's costume shows him to be a poor devil who will pick up pieces of divers colors in order to mend his coat; his hat corresponds to his beggarly habits, while the rabbit's scut which is its ornament, is even to this day the trimming common to the headgear of Bergamesk peasants.

This will explain sufficiently the origin and the use of the four principal masks. It remains for me to speak of the effects they produce.

The masks cannot but hamper the art of the actor. Whether he try to express joy or grief, whether he show passionate or gentle love, it is always the same leather that intrudes. He may gesticulate, and vary the

tone of his voice as much as he will; yet he can never express thru his features, which are the interpreters of the heart, such passions as the character he represents may feel. The public demands that the actor interpret a soul, but a soul under a mask is like fire under ashes. Any plan of reform must, therefore, include a gradual obliteration of the masks, as well as a substitution of pure comedy for slapstick farce.[11]

My first play, 'Belisario,' was performed amid extraordinary silence, an almost unknown phenomenon in Italian theaters. Yet, used as it was to hubbub, the audience made up between the acts for its quiet with cries of joy, handclappings, and reciprocal signals repeated from the pit to the boxes. At the end of the performance the unusual outbursts of satisfaction increased to such a din that the actors wept and laughed in turn. When the leading man appeared to make the customary announcement for the following evening, the audience cried in chorus: "No, this one, this one!" and the curtain fell. The play was not worth all this admiration. I myself think so little of it, that it shall never appear in the printed collection of my works.

But my heroes were men, not demi-gods. They showed human foibles in the way we all know them to be, they did not carry their virtues and vices to fantastic excess.[12]

I had, however, not yet acquired sufficient experience to do aught but ponder the ways and means of reform. But I observed. And, for instance, I saw that even in poor comedies there is often something that will call forth applause from the pit and approval from the boxes; I noticed that this occurs mostly at a moment of intense seriousness, of delicate humor, or when a good situation is shown, when some noteworthy character is being truthfully revealed, or some contemporary custom worth correcting is being exposed in its results. Above all I remarkt that more than the marvelous, it was the simple, the natural that won the heart of an audience.[13]

When I brought my bride home to Venice, the company of actors for whom I had been writing more or less, were glad to see me, the more so since I brought them a new play.[14] What made this troupe exceptional was the presence in it of a famous Harlequin, Sacchi by name, whose wife played the Second Lady

very well, and whose sister was a good soubrette.

"There you are," I said to myself; "you can now give free rein to your imagination. You have workt on hackneyed material long enough, now you must create, invent. You have promising actors, but in order to get out of them what is in them, you must study them, for each has his own natural bent. Success will almost be assured if you give them characters to act which are analogous to their own. Come," I went on reflecting, "this is perhaps your chance to attempt the reform you have had in mind so long. Yes, you must handle character subjects, they being the source of all good comedy. This is what Molière did, thus developing his art to a degree which the ancients only indicated, and which the moderns have not yet equaled."

In accordance with these musings I searched in the company for the actor best suited to playing a maskless character. I chose the Pantaloon Colinetti, because I had formed a high opinion of his manner in the society of people among whom I had studied him. I believed I could make him an excellent portrayer of a gentleman, and I was not

mistaken. Therefore I wrote for him a comedy entitled 'Momolo Cortesan or L'Uomo di Mondo,' the Man of the World. "Are there many such in Venice?" you will ask. Yes, there are not a few, and some possess, more or less, the very qualities I depicted in Momolo. To present such a character to the public, however, one has to pad it, and I drest mine in all the perfection of the species.

In order to bring out a character I have always thought it necessary to place it in direct contrast with another, whose nature is the opposite of it. I therefore introduced into my play a Venetian good-for-nothing. My Gentleman defends the dupes of this scoundrel against his snares, finally unmasking him. Thus the Harlequin in this piece is no longer a slapstick valet, but becomes a rascal fundamentally characterized by the fact that he insists upon his sister's maintaining him in his vices by her shame.

This comedy enjoyed excellent success, and I was content. My compatriots were beginning to give up their antiquated taste for farce. My reform was started. Yet I could not boast of it. The play was not dialogued. Nothing but the part of the leading man was

written out, all the rest being left in improvized form. Indeed, the smoothness of style which distinguishes classical authors was not there. I could not reform everything at once without antagonizing the lovers of Improvized Comedy; but I awaited the favorable moment for a frontal attack, when I could deliver it with more vigor and greater effect.[15]

My experience goes to prove that the reputation of a playwright often depends upon the performance of the actors. There is no use hiding this truth from oneself.[16] I always took time, therefore, and sought opportunity to study the divers natures of my players. When I began to work for Medebac's troupe, I soon observed in Darbes, one of its members, two contrasting but habitual facial expressions, to which his manner and action corresponded. He would be the jolliest, wittiest, and most energetic man in the world, then suddenly assume the expression, the speech, and the ways of an imbecile, or bumpkin, and these changes would take place in him quite naturally, without apparent effort. This discovery gave me the idea of making him appear under these two differ-

ent aspects in the same play. Another successful comedy, 'I due Gemelli Veneziani,' was the result.[17]

As long as I continued working over the time-worn materials of the Improvized Comedy and produced only partly written plays, I was permitted to enjoy in peace the applause of the pit; but as soon as I laid claim to being a regular author, a poet, a creator, people awoke from their lethargy and considered me worthy of their criticism. Indeed, my countrymen, for so long a time accustomed to trivial farces and elaborate scenery, suddenly became severe censors of my work. They made the names of Aristotle, Horace and Castelvetro resound thruout their clubs, and my plays became the talk of the town.

I might to-day refrain from recalling these verbose disputes, which drifted away with the wind and which my successes made harmless, but I am glad to refer to them now, because of the opportunity thus afforded of telling my readers about my way of thinking in regard to the rules of comedy, and the method I planned to follow when writing a play.

The unities, required for the greater perfection of theatrical work, were at all times

open to discussion among authors and critics. The censors of my character-comedies had no reproach to make concerning the unity of action, nor in regard to the unity of time, but they asserted that I had failed to satisfy the requirements of the unity of place. Yet the action in my comedies always transpired in one city. The characters might move about, it is true, in different parts of it, but they remained within the limits of the same walls. I believed then, and believe now, that the unity of place is thereby satisfactorily observed.

In every art, in every discovery, experience has ever preceded precept. Authors have later laid down methods for the practical guidance of inventiveness, but the moderns have ever reserved the right to interpret these methods of the ancients. As for me, since I do not find either in Aristotle's or Horace's 'Poetics' a clear, absolute, and vigorously workt-out principle regarding the unity of place in comedy, I have, indeed, been glad to conform whenever my subject lent itself to the idea, but I have never sacrificed a comedy, which had a chance to turn out well,

to a prejudice which would have rendered it unsatisfactory.[18] If Aristotle were now alive, he would cancel the obnoxious rule, for a thousand absurdities, a thousand blunders and improprieties are caused by it.

There are, it seems to me, two kinds of comedy, pure comedy and comedy of intrigue. The first can be written while observing the unity of the place, the second cannot thus be constructed without crudity and incongruity. The ancients had not, as we have, a way to shift scenery, and for this reason they observed all the unities. We comply with the unity of place when the action occurs in the same city, and all the more when it remains in the same house. I conclude, therefore, that if comedy can be constructed in compliance with the unity of place without hairsplitting and unseemliness, it should be done; but if, because of it, absurdities must be introduced, it is better to change the plot and observe the rules of probability.[19]

Like Aristotle, Horace has been made to say more than he intended. I refer particularly to the precept that not more than three

persons should act at the same time in one scene. He says: "Nec quarta loqui persona laboret." Some think this to mean: "Let no more than three work." What he must have intended to say is that, if there are four persons, one of them should not exert himself; that is, the four actors should not be simultaneously in action with one another, as happens in improvized scenes, in which four or five persons immediately cause confusion. For that matter, scenes may be arranged for eight, or ten persons, provided their action is carefully regulated and that they allow each other to speak in turn.[20]

For this reason, when certain fanatic admirers of antiquity demand of me either a scrupulous application of the unity of place, or an adherence to the idea that not more than three persons should speak in one scene, or any similar finicality which has no relation to the constituent beauty of comedy, I answer them by pointing to the contrary usage of many authors approved by the fame of centuries. There are things in ancient comedy which, tho pleasing in their day, would prove intolerable in ours. I hold, therefore,

that one should obey the laws of national and contemporary characteristics in a spectacle designed to divert, delight, and incidentally to instruct, rather than comply with certain precepts attributed to Aristotle or Horace. Those haters of novelty who insist on a complete accord with bygone standards appear to me like physicians who refuse to prescribe quinine for the sole reason that Hippocrates or Galen had not yet adopted it.[21]

My countrymen, I think, would never have been so severe with me but for the ill-balanced zeal of my partisans, on whom they reacted. Well-informed people merely condemned the fanaticism of those who set too high a value on my work. Meanwhile, disputes waxed ever warmer,[22] complaints and compliments coming thick and fast. To me the two opposing parties were a thorn in the flesh. Trying to content both, I submitted to the task of constructing improvized plays without ceasing to write character-comedies. I had the inveterate mask-actors do their work in one class, and employed the more capable and adaptable human material in the

other. Thus each party had its innings, and in the course of time, with patience, I slowly led them into a common understanding. After a few years I enjoyed the satisfaction of seeing myself authorized to follow my own ideas, and they became the most generally accepted and the most popular in Italy.[23]

But before I was able to write comedies which could pass muster, I, too, constructed bad ones. I wrote some plays after the Spanish manner, that is to say, comedies of intrigue with considerable complexity in their plots. They met with unwonted success thru a certain logical texture and regularity which distinguisht them from the usual pieces of that sort, as well as thru an undeniable naturalness and plausibility that made them worthy of note. I thought that if they succeeded so well when only the principal characters were provided with the proper directions and words, and the others were left to improvization with a resulting unevenness and precariousness in the performance, these plays would have turned out considerably better if all the rôles had been written out. Thereby more variety could be introduced, all the characters could be smoothed on the lathe of Na-

ture, national taste could be completely met. The success of the 'Clever Woman,' the 'Prudent Man,' the 'Artful Widow,' the 'Respectable Girl,' the 'Cavalier and the Lady,' the 'Antiquarian's Family,' and others belonging to my début, proved that I was right and that efforts to restore manners and decency to the stage of Italy were not likely to be in vain.[24]

I cannot boast that I developt to this degree of better sense thru an assiduous and methodical study of the best ancient and modern writers and poets. Altho I have not neglected reading them, thus receiving as from good teachers the best examples and precepts, I must confess that the two books upon which I have meditated most and which I shall never repent having used are The World and The Stage. It is a fact that no one becomes a master in playwriting who neglects the study of these books. The first of the two, The World, shows me so many characters, and depicts them to me so invitingly, that it seems to have been created expressly to provide me with plots for pleasing and instructive comedies. It presents to me the depth, the power, the effect of every hu-

man passion; and calling my attention to curious happenings, it informs me concerning current customs; furnishing me with knowledge of the foibles and defects common in our century and nation, it indicates to me, thru the medium of some excellent person, how virtue resists corruption. Hence I draw upon this book as upon a bank, returning again and again, and meditating upon whatever I take from it under all the circumstances of life. My experience shows how indispensable it is to any one who would exercise my profession.

The second, that is the book of the Stage, makes me see with what colors the characters, the passions, the action we read about in the book of the World, should be bodied forth, how these must be painted and shaded to throw them in relief, and how varied to render them grateful to the discerning eye of the spectator. I learn from the stage what is most likely to impress the minds of men, what will awaken wonder and laughter, and what will cause that delightful sensation which people come to enjoy in the theater. It teaches me that this is provoked mainly by filling comedy with natural images, and by

tactfully placing before the vision of the audience those foibles and ridiculous delusions which can be seen in what happens all the time.

The stage shows me through the fate of my comedies how to estimate the character of the nation for which I write. Some of my productions which I held in no esteem at all, have aroused great praise, while others, from which I expected no ordinary applause, gained but a languid interest, if they did not receive adverse criticism. Thru this experience I have learned that if I would make my plays more practically useful, I must regulate my ideas in accordance with those that prevail universally, without paying much attention to the dicta of men who assume the right of prescribing rules of taste for a whole people, nay, for the entire world and for all centuries to come, and who do so upon a foundation of mental arguments only. These do not reflect that in certain non-intrinsic respects tastes and ideas change with impunity, and that the public is the arbiter in this case, as it is in the matter of clothes and language.[25]

This then is what I have learned from my

two great books, The World and The Stage. My comedies are in the main regulated upon the precepts found in them only, and I shrewdly surmise that the first authors of comedy consulted no others. "Whatever is represented on the stage ought to be a copy of what occurs in the world," says Rapin. Comedy is what it should be, when we seem to be in a company of neighbors or taking part in some familiar conversation, while in reality we find ourselves in the theater. Nothing must be shown that has no counterpart in everyday life.[26]

I have read, it is true, all manner of treatises on Poetics, on Tragedy and Comedy, but only after having formed my own style, or during the process of developing it in the light which The World and The Stage provided. Afterwards I perceived that I had unconsciously conformed very largely to the most essential precepts of the art as recommended by the great masters: like that physician who, having discovered partly by chance, partly thru experience, a wholesome medicine, subsequently applies to it the accepted principles of his art, regulating and systematizing it.[27]

Comedy was invented to expose foibles and ridicule disagreeable habits. When the ancients wrote comedies on that plan, the whole world liked them, for on seeing the facsimile of a character upon the boards, everybody saw the original in his neighbor or himself. When comedy became merely ridiculous, however, the most extravagant absurdities were gradually introduced under the pretext of causing laughter. Now that we are again fishing in the *Mare magnum* of nature, men find themselves searching their hearts anew and identifying themselves with the persons presented, for they know how to discern whether or no a passion is well depicted, a character well developed and sustained: in short, they observe.[28]

My play of the 'Punctilious Ladies' afforded me a striking illustration of this fact. I wrote this comedy in Mantua and had it performed on the local stage in order to try it out. It pleased greatly, but I ran the risk of drawing upon my head the wrath of one of the first ladies of the region. I learned later that she had not long before been in the situation of the countess in the play, who introduced Rosaura into society for a pe-

cuniary consideration. Everybody stared in the direction of her box, but luckily for me, the lady was too broad-minded to lay herself open to the malice of the audience, applauding as she did every passage that might apply to her. Similar incidents occurred in Florence and Verona, in each of these cities it was thought that I had found my subject on the spot.[29]

Yet I always direct my criticism at social foibles in general, never at any sinner in particular; besides, it never becomes satire.[30] While writing a play I always strive to please the land of my fathers, to make it novel and yet keep it national, to win hearts thru the attractiveness of virtue rather than by the sorry sight of vice. Indeed, a comedy which is truly an imitation of nature, need not shun clean and pathetic sentiment, provided that it be not barren of those comic and witty features which are the fundamental basis of its existence.[31] I have had no other care than to please the average man, to induce people to frequent the theater, and to procure profit for him who pays me for my work.[32]

For you must know that during most of my career I have placed my muse and my pen

at the disposal of the owners or directors of theaters. Such engagements may be thought peculiar. A man of letters, you will say, must be free, and should despise servitude and restraint.

If an author is well-to-do, like Voltaire, or cynical, as is Rousseau, I have nothing to reply; but if he be one of those who do not refuse a share in the receipts, or in the benefits of publication, if he enjoy no emolument from a court, no pension or gifts, and yet is disposed to contribute products of his brain, he has no other resource in Italy.[33] After all, when one possesses a talent, I do not see why he should make no practical use of it.[34]

My contracts with theatrical managers were generally quite satisfactory. My reputation once establisht, my work was accepted before being read, and paid for before the first performance.[35] And this is bound to be, for if the public applauds a play, it may be said without a doubt that the author has done a good piece of work. The box-office receipts show the manager whether a comedy has drawing power,[36] and while he will respect a poet as a man of education, he will not read his manuscript or listen to him thru

mere curiosity. What a manager looks for is a good, new idea.[37] In the drama novelty is of prime importance.[38]

To make a play succeed, many things of beauty must be united. The least flaw may make it a failure.[39] Tho lacking an interesting story, a comedy may have nevertheless many beautiful details; yet, if there is no complication and suspense in the action, it cannot be other than a poor play.[40] The style, too, must be proper to comedy, that is to say, simple and natural, not academic or elevated. The great art lies in adhering to nature in all things, never deviating from it. Sentiments must be true, not affected; expression within the comprehension of all. The commonest traits please more than delicate conceits.[41] Moreover, it is with national morals and customs, with our own foibles and absurdities, that Comedy should be concerned.[42]

My 'Campiello,' for instance, gave great pleasure. Everything in it was copied from the lower classes, to be sure, but the whole action was of a truth which all recognized, the great and the small being interested in

the story, for I had substituted simplicity for tinsel, and nature for the fantasmagoria of a diseased imagination. My 'Buona Famiglia,' on the other hand, may be one of those plays of mine which, if taken to heart, might benefit society morally. It was enjoyed by well-bred folk, by virtuous households, wise fathers, and prudent mothers; but as these do not belong exactly to the sort of people who make managers rich, it had but few performances. Though revived occasionally by amateurs, it died a speedy death on the public stage,[43] for when the groundwork is not felicitous, there is no remedy that avails, the structure being unable to rise with vigor.[44]

Indeed, writing comedies is a difficult business, and I do not flatter myself with the illusion that I shall ever learn just in what comic perfection consists.[45] But this I know, that in order to create wholesome laughter, one must first laugh oneself.[46] When things are said and done with grace, they get a double value. The shorter, therefore, and the more unexpected comic scenes are, the more they please. The principal comedian

should act copiously and speak sparingly. When he speaks, he should deliver his thrust pungently and at the right time, not cynically, as if under stress. He may be allowed to mutilate expressions naturally, as in dialect, but he must not twist and murder words. Especially should he beware of that cheap innuendo in which so many would-be comedies abound. In order to succeed, you must create something of your own, and to create you must study.[47]

I have also learned not to seek my subject in the associations of crime, but rather to choose it among the merely ridiculous;[48] and to know that while improbability will kill a play,[49] an artistic mixture of the pathetic and the comical is ever an element of surprise.[50] The catastrophe, too, must be in accordance with human nature.[51] Altho one may ridicule changes in fashion, head-dress, or summer life in the country, in order to make woman a fit subject for comic attack, the ridicule must be supplied by the vagaries of her mind, not by the whimsies of her heart. Even so, tho the presentation of a female character may thus be comic in its own right, it has to

be propt up by interesting and pleasing situations, else it may easily bore.

Rosaura in the 'Fickle Woman' is such a comic character. She falls in love at one moment, and in the next falls out again; now she utters with apparent conviction certain principles and maxims, then flies, with light-headed calculation, after passions which contradict them quite. The situation at the end of the play fits the ridiculous, but not vicious folly under attack. Rosaura has finally made up her mind to marry, but all now avoid her, no man wants her for a wife.[52]

To the benefit of the public, and thru the influence of my example, the evil stage manners that once were customary have at last been banisht, and scandalous scenes have been abolisht. No longer does one hear obscene expressions, filthy ambiguities, or depraved talk.[53] Yet I had to spend many years in dramatic labor before I was allowed to do things worth while. I did not become a comic author suddenly, but succeeded little by little, after long and arduous practice and a continuous, untiring study of reality.[54] Let no one think, however, that I have the te-

merity to believe that my plays are devoid of defects. Far from that presumption,[55] I am always a-tremble when a new comedy of mine goes on the boards,[56] and I take daily pains to improve my methods of writing.[57]

It may, indeed, interest some readers how I progrest in that respect. My rules cannot be safe to follow, however, for in mental work the result frequently depends upon the state of mind in which one happens to be, rather than upon establisht and proven ability. Hence it is that among the works of any author the first are often better than the last, and sometimes the last better than the first; while again and again one may notice that variety of good and bad which is the despair of Olympus.

Perhaps more than anyone I have fallen into inequalities of manner, style, and verve, because of the quantity of plays I have produced in a short space of time or the haste with which I have many times been forced to write, and because of the consequent disinclination I have often felt for creative work. Revision for purposes of publication may have imparted a little more evenness, producing better results in language and expression,

but the shrewd reader will nevertheless be able to say: "This was a stroke of genius, that was written when the author was apathetic.[58]

Indeed, how many comedies have I not dasht off in six or seven days! How often, when prest for time, have I not sent away a first act for rehearsal and, without seeing it again, written the second, the third being done with the same celerity! In the course of time, however, I would notice the effect which my plays made upon the public. I heard the criticism and the censure, and when some of them were about to go to press, I would reconstruct them, better them, and sometimes change them completely.[59] Yet I am bound to say that experience and habit by degrees so familiarized me with the art of playwriting that, when the subject was once thought out and the characters determined upon, the rest finally became mere routine. I knew I possest a good deal of aptitude, and I knew I could work with greater ardor when under pressure.[60]

To illustrate this point, the time when I had promised the Venetian public sixteen comedies may be cited. Only one play re-

mained to be written to fill my engagement. We had reached the last Sunday but one of the Carnival, and I had not done a single line of the last one of the series. I had nothing in mind for it yet. I left my house for a walk about St. Mark's Square, seeking distraction. I lookt about to see if any of the masks or jugglers might furnish me with the subject of a comedy or farce for Shrovetide. I met, under the arcade of the clock, a man with whom I was instantly struck, and who provided me with the subject of which I was in quest. This was an old Armenian, ill-drest, very dirty, and with a long beard, who went about the streets of Venice selling the dried fruits of his country, which he called Abagigi. This man, who was to be seen everywhere, and whom I had myself frequently met, was so well known and so much despised, that when any one wisht to tease a girl seeking a husband, he proposed to her Abagigi.

Nothing more was needed to send me home satisfied. I entered my house, shut myself up in my closet, and began a popular comedy, which I called 'I Pettegolezzi delle donne,' or Women's Tittle-Tattle. I could

not get it performed until Shrove-Tuesday, and it closed the Carnival season. The crowd was so great that day that the price of boxes tripled and quadrupled, and the applause so tumultuous that the passers-by did not know whether it was an effect of satisfaction or a general riot. I sat quietly in my box, surrounded by friends who wept for joy. Then a crowd came for me, bade me come out, and carried me in spite of myself to the Ridotto, where, dragging me from room to room, they forced me to accept a series of compliments which I would gladly have avoided.

I was too tired to bear the ceremony; besides, not knowing whence came the enthusiasm of the moment, I was vext that this play should have been placed above so many others which I liked better. Little by little, however, I unraveled the motive of this general acclaim: it was the triumph of having fulfilled what I had contracted to do.[61]

At another time, after the success of 'Pamela,' my friends insisted that, in order to save myself the trouble of inventing a plot, I should again write a play based upon some novel. Tired of their opportunings, I finally

said that I would prefer to construct a comedy from which a novel might be made. Some began to laugh, while others took me at my word. These said: "Then write us a novel in action, a piece as complicated as a novel." "I'll make you one," I replied. "Will you?" "I will." "On your word?" "On my word." So I went home, and excited by my wager, I began the play—and the novel—at the same time, without having a plot for either.

I need, so I said to myself, a lot of action, surprise, bewilderment, and an interesting situation, with comical and pathetic elements besides. A heroine would interest more than a hero. Where shall I look for her? We shall see. In the meantime, let us take an unknown lady for protagonist. So I wrote on the paper: the 'Unknown,' Comedy, Act One, Scene the First. This woman must have a name; yes, let us call her Rosaura. But will she enter alone to announce the argument of the piece? No, that's just where Comedy used to fail. Let her enter with . . . Yes, with Florindo . . . Rosaura and Florindo.

This is how I began the 'Unknown,' and

how I continued writing it, thus building a large structure, without knowing whether I was building a temple or a barn. Each scene led to another, one incident produced the next, and the next. At the end of the first act the plot was outlined, I merely had to fill it in. I was astonisht at the quantity and the novelty of the events with which my imagination provided me. At the end of the second act I bethought myself of a catastrophe, and from then on all my skill was exerted to make it unexpected and surprising, yet so that it would not fall from the clouds, as it were. The play pleased my friends and the public, and everybody averred that it could supply the material for a novel of four volumes in octavo.[62]

It was not always success and friendship, however, which spurred me on to bursts of speed. I had thought that the 'Whimsical Old Man,' for instance, would have had at least the success of the 'Man of the World,' but I was horribly mistaken. Rubini had never played without a mask and was so uncomfortable, and so embarrassed, that he lost all his grace, as well as his wits, and his common sense. The play fell flat, most

humiliatingly for himself and for me. It came to an end under difficulties, and when the curtain fell, hisses arose on every side.

I escaped quickly in order to avoid back-handed compliments, and went to the Ridotto. Concealed beneath my mask, I mingled with the crowd which collects there after the theater, and had the time and the opportunity to listen to the eulogies lavished upon me and my piece.

Passing thru the gaming rooms, I saw groups everywhere in earnest discussion, and they were all talking about me. "Goldoni is thru," some said, "Goldoni has emptied his bag." I recognized the voice of a mask who spoke thru his nose, and who said in a loud voice that my portfolio was exhausted. He was asked to what portfolio he referred. "It is the collection of manuscripts," he answered, "that has furnished Goldoni with everything he has done till this day." In spite of the wish of all to make fun of me, everybody began to laugh at the nasal voice. I was looking for criticism, and found only ignorance and animosity.

I went home, past the night somehow, and searcht the while for a way to avenge myself

upon the mockers. I found one at last, and at sunrise began a comedy in five acts and in verse, entitled the 'Ball.'

Act by act I sent it to the copyist. The actors learned their rôles as they came forth; on the fourth day the play was announced on a poster, and it was performed on the fifteenth day. It was, indeed, a case of *facit indignatio versus*. The gist of the piece was again a phase of *cicisbeatura,* a husband forcing his wife to give a ball for his *cicisbea*. I arranged for a gathering of tired dancers in a drawing-room adjacent to the ballroom. There I caused the conversation to fall on the 'Whimsical Old Man.' I had all the ridiculous talk which I heard at the Ridotto, repeated; I made all the characters argue for and against the piece, and my defense was approved by the applause of the public. It was evident that Goldoni was not thru, that his bag was not empty, that his portfolio was not exhausted. Listen, my fellow authors, there is no other way for us to take revenge on the public than to force it to applaud us.[68]

I used to go thru four processes before taking up the construction and final polishing

of a play. The first step was the making of the outline with its division into the three principal parts: the exposition, the arch of the plot, and the catastrophe. The second step consisted in the apportioning of the action among acts and scenes; the third in the dialoguing of the most interesting incidents, the fourth in the general dialoguing of the whole.

It often happened that, when the last process was reacht, I had by that time changed everything I had done in the second and third, for ideas succeed one another, one scene produces the next, a word found by chance suggests a new thought. After a time, therefore, I came to combine the four operations into one. With the plot and the three divisions constantly in mind, I now begin at once: Act One, Scene One; so I proceed to the end, ever remembering that the lines must converge toward a single point, determined beforehand, that is to say, toward the climax of the action, which is the principal part of the play, and for which it appears that all the machinery of planning and constructing has been set in motion.

In my climaxes I have rarely been mis-

taken. I can say this with assurance, for the whole world has told me so. Besides, the problem does not seem difficult to me. It is, on the contrary, quite easy to find a satisfying solution when you provide for it at the beginning of the play and do not lose sight of it in the course of the work.[64] Tastes, however, keep on changing from day to day, and my comedies, which are now triumphant, will surely become mere rubbish in the course of time.

Indeed, all comedy becomes old-fashioned in the long run, however well it may have been written, or revamped and revived. But the manner of writing it, I hope, always has room in which to improve. True and recognizable characters never grow stale, and altho their number is not infinite in kind, it is infinite in species, since every virtue, every vice, every custom, every defect assumes its hue from the continuously varying circumstances which surround it.[65]

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Note. 'Memoirs' stands for "Memorie di Carlo Goldoni riprodotte integralmente dalla edizione originale francese. Con prefazione e note di Guido Mazzoni." Two volumes, Florence, 1907.

'Pasquali' stands for Giambattista Pasquali's edition of Goldoni's Works in 17 volumes, begun in 1761 and finished sometime after 1777. Only the Introduction in volume one has been referred to.

'Il Teatro comico' is a play by Goldoni given for the first time October 5, 1750. It discusses the author's ideas about playwriting.

[1] Memoirs I, page 313.
[2] Pasquali I, page ix.
[3] Teatro comico, Introduzione.
[4] Pasquali I, page ix.
[5] Memoirs I, page 291.
[6] Pasquali I, page ix.
[7] Pasquali I, page xi.
[8] Pasquali I, page xii.
[9] Memoirs I, page 354.
[10] Pasquali I, page xii.
[11] Memoirs II, page 37.
[12] Memoirs I, page 204.
[13] Pasquali I, page xii.
[14] Memoirs I, page 228.
[15] Memoirs I, page 230.
[16] Memoirs I, page 239.
[17] Memoirs I, page 301.
[18] Memoirs I, page 310.
[19] Teatro comico, Act II, Scene 3.
[20] Teatro comico, Act III, Scene 9.
[21] Pasquali I, page xiii.

[22] Memoirs I, page 311.
[23] Memoirs II, page 40.
[24] Pasquali I, page xiv.
[25] Pasquali I, page xv.
[26] Pasquali I, page xvii.
[27] Pasquali I, page xviii.
[28] Teatro comico, Act II, Scene 1.
[29] Memoirs I, page 329.
[30] Teatro comico, Act III, Scene 9.
[31] Memoirs I, page 312.
[32] Lettera dell' Autore dell' opera intitolata 'Nerone' scritta ad un suo amico che serve di prefazione all' opera stessa. Venice, December 28, 1748. See also Memoirs I, page 455.
[33] Memoirs I, page 290.
[34] Memoirs II, page 213.
[35] Memoirs I, page 291.
[36] Teatro comico, Act I, Scene 7.
[37] Teatro comico, Act I, Scene 6.
[38] Teatro comico, Act I, Scene 2.
[39] Memoirs II, page 211.
[40] Memoirs I, page 376.
[41] Pasquali I, page xviii.
[42] Memoirs II, page 42.
[43] Memoirs II, page 89.
[44] Pasquali I, page iv.
[45] Teatro comico, Act III, Scene 11.
[46] Teatro comico, Act I, Scene 8.
[47] Teatro comico, Act III, Scene 11.
[48] Memoirs I, page 235.
[49] Memoirs I, page 278.
[50] Memoirs I, page 279.
[51] Memoirs I, page 337.
[52] Memoirs I, page 354.
[53] Teatro comico, Act III, Scene 3.
[54] Teatro comico, Act III, Scene 2.
[55] Pasquali I, page xviii.
[56] Teatro comico, Act III, Scene 11.
[57] Pasquali I, page xviii.
[58] Pasquali I, page iv.
[59] Lettera dell' avvocato C. G. ad un suo amico in Venetia. Florence, April 28, 1753. In 'Lettere di C. Goldoni,' ed. by G. M. Urbani de Ghelthof, Venice, 1880, p. 65. See also 'Fogli Sparsi,' ed. by A. G. Spinelli, Milan, 1855, p. 25.

[60] Memoirs II, page 119.
[61] Memoirs I, page 355.
[62] Memoirs I, page 351.
[63] Memoirs II, page 34.
[64] Memoirs II, page 119.
[65] Teatro comico, Act III, Scene 9.

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